

**Statement regarding the County's surplus property formerly known as
the "Crooked Creek Golf Course"**
January 15, 2019

On Monday, January 7th, the Wake County Board of Commissioners voted to declare the former Crooked Creek golf course, purchased by the County in September 2018, as "surplus" property. Above all else, the Board's action that day was a reset, as well as a necessary legal process that opened the door for new opportunities to work with local municipalities and community groups toward a mutually-beneficial solution. We are very encouraged by the interest that multiple elected officials and local leaders have directly expressed in resolving this matter for the citizens we all serve.

Because of the volume of misinformation circulating in online social media platforms and in some media outlets, we believe it is important to present the facts of this situation, our perspective based on those facts, and our path toward resolving the Crooked Creek and southern Wake park access issues with the transparency and best practices that citizens expect from their government.

Working closely with County staff, current Commissioners are now focused on solutions that remove the Crooked Creek property from Wake County's list of statutory obligations and priorities, while at the same time respecting and reflecting the enduring values we share as a community - including equity, fairness and fiscal responsibility. We recognize that most citizens were not able to attend the [January 7th Board of Commissioners' meeting](#) (or watch a recording of it, which may be seen by [clicking here](#)), during which Commissioners shared their views and rationales for voting as each did on the proposed action. We therefore believe it would be helpful for citizens to be able to review the facts of the situation, and our perspective, which we offer for consideration below.

We understand the dilemma that many homeowners face as golf courses within their planned communities are failing across the country due to golf's decline in popularity. (See the [January 10, 2019 Wall Street Journal article "Golf Home Owners Find Themselves in a Hole"](#) or the [July 12, 2018 Forbes article "Homeowners will Pay the Price For a Backyard Golf Course, One Way or Another."](#)) We fully appreciate the intent of the Crooked Creek homeowners to preserve this land and their personal interests for doing so, but we do not believe it is the County's responsibility to use millions of taxpayer dollars to rescue homeowners who took on this risk in private transactions. Doing so ignores multiple other golf course failures within Wake County in recent decades, where there were no calls for taxpayer-funded preservation of those properties as parks or open space. The County's contested purchase of the former Crooked Creek Golf Course opened serious questions about broader community's expectations of the County's role when other landholders and private property owners may insist that the County again use taxpayer dollars to buy and develop their unprofitable, bankrupt, folded or abandoned properties under the umbrella of "preserving open space" or creating "A Park for Everyone!" - as is the case with Crooked Creek.

The entire Board has an ongoing commitment to preserve open space as one of the [County's Board-adopted Strategic Goals and Objectives](#). And there is a process for acquiring, planning and developing these projects. Yet, the County has limited resources and competing priorities for our tax dollars such as funding public education, affordable housing, community health needs, and transit.

So while it was framed by some as a “great deal,” the facts below prove that the purchase of the former Crooked Creek golf course (and the process by which it was purchased) was not in the best interest of Wake County citizens. The purchase was not the result of transparent, good government, and it further committed County taxpayers to multiple millions of dollars of improvements and annual maintenance. We believe the Crooked Creek property should never have been purchased and set a poor precedent that needed to be corrected. The reasons for this position have been made clear but are worth reviewing again:

- County staff’s professional recommendation to the previous Board was to pass on buying the property, due to the legal issues involved and other, previously-adopted priorities of the County parks system and no identified funding stream.
- The previous Board majority ignored County staff’s advice and purchased Crooked Creek anyway, paying over 99% of fully-appraised value. This was no bargain for Wake’s taxpayers.
- The County should not be in the business of failed golf course bailouts. Crooked Creek was originally a golf course within a planned residential golf community. There is land elsewhere in the County that is a far better investment, with greater access to the public, than the former golf course, which is spread throughout the middle of a residential neighborhood.
- There are significant future costs required to convert the property to a County park, in addition to maintenance and other related costs. No funding streams were identified to cover those costs, which far exceed the original purchase price of the property. According to information that County staff shared with Commissioners, additional expenses for the property through 2022 include:
 - \$7.09 million in required roadway and utility improvements.
 - \$7 million in park development.
 - \$2.4 million in facility repairs.
 - \$1.8 million for staffing and operating costs.
 - \$201,637 for startup equipment.
 - \$305,400 for the impact of development.
- During the planning and development process, maintenance of the property requires a minimum of \$70,000 annually for lawn mowing and trimming the bushes – which County staff has stated is unprecedented with any other unused open space owned by the County.
We believe this is a wasteful use of taxpayer dollars. Further, the County would be liable for the safety of anyone accessing the property in the interim years prior to its development.
- [The Parks, Open Space and Greenways Master Plan \(linked here\)](#) has long-established project priorities throughout the County. Many Wake County citizens have waited patiently for long-planned projects to be moved forward. Crooked Creek was never part of these plans, [nor was it included in the projects covered in the Parks Bond that citizens overwhelmingly supported in the recent election.](#)
- At the [November 6, 2017 meeting](#) where the previous Board of Commissioners voted 4-3 to purchase the former Crooked Creek golf course, Wake County Community Services

Director Cope provided Commissioners with insight into the ranking process used to prioritize existing parks, open space and greenway projects. Please see the attached information below regarding this ranking process, participants and results. The most recent analysis identified project costs at over \$400 Million for existing projects. Mr. Cope stated at the time that the Crooked Creek property, if purchased by the County, would be ranked by the County's citizen and staff committee as the lowest-priority project within Wake County.

- The previous Board's majority instructed County staff, against their professional advice, to use the County's savings account to buy the former Crooked Creek golf course, since there were no additional funds remaining from the previous voter-approved [2007 Parks & Open Space Bond](#). This was not fiscally responsible governance, nor was it fair to other County residents outside of the Crooked Creek development, who lived near other long-planned parks projects.
- Keeping the Crooked Creek property would require annual maintenance and mowing, additional fencing, and continued liability risks. These costs would be incurred while the land inevitably sits idle for years to come, as Crooked Creek remains ranked last on the County's list of project priorities.
- With the Southeast Regional County Park project, the County purchased twice as much land at less than one third of the cost per acre than Crooked Creek - just six miles away - and with far easier access to the public. [The Board acquired the final major piece of property for Southeast Regional Park in 2017](#), which allowed County staff to begin the planning process. The development for the already County-owned and planned Southeast Regional County Park project [was included in published 2018 Parks, Greeways, Recreation & Open Space Bond information](#).
- On January 7th, the Board voted to fast-track the Southeast Regional County Park project as the top-priority use of the 2018 Parks Bond funds, which accelerated its planned opening to the public for a Staff-estimated target date of Summer 2021.
- The current Board of Commissioners voted to declare the Crooked Creek property as surplus on January 7th, which we firmly believe the previous Board should not have purchased. Having now done so, we are working on a long-term solution that is cost-effective and fair to all taxpayers. County staff are already engaged in discussions with potential partners, with careful consideration of all possibilities and in keeping with the County's policies and procedures.
- The homeowners of Crooked Creek, the Town of Fuquay Varina, or any conservatory are welcome to purchase the property and maintain it themselves. We stand by our belief that the County should not be in the business of property development that serves only the needs of a few citizens at great expense to all Wake County taxpayers.

We would now like to address the issue of equity and access, and the need for a County park in Southern Wake. Population density and growth projection maps from County staff clearly show that 40% of Wake County's population lives within a 10-minute drive of a County park - which is the standard previously set for a citizen's convenient access to a Wake County park. Because it is 6 miles from the County's Crowder Park, the Crooked Creek community is already within that standard. Put another way, even before completion of the previously planned Southeast

Regional County Park, residents of the Crooked Creek community already have better access to a County park than over half of all other residents throughout Wake County. If Crooked Creek were built as an additional County park after Southeast Regional County Park is opened, County staff indicates that the net increase in Wake citizens' convenient access to a County park would be only **0.7%** - a truly meager improvement that does not justify the spending of millions of additional taxpayer dollars for upgrades and operating costs.

As Commissioners, we serve the entire County. Other parts of Wake County are still underserved and do not enjoy the access to nearby parks that Crooked Creek residents already have to Crowder Park and will enjoy through Southeast Regional County Park. How would keeping, maintaining, or developing the Crooked Creek property be fair to those many other citizens who are still hoping for a single park within 10 minutes of their homes? We can and should do better to fairly allocate our County's resources for the benefit of all the citizens we serve.

The citizens of southern Wake County deserve a great County park. We believe this park should be the previously-planned Southeast Regional County Park, which will be more than twice the size of Crooked Creek - for a third of the property cost - and for which bonds were approved by Wake County voters. Upon its completion, citizens will enjoy easy access to Southeast Regional County Park, unlike Crooked Creek's former golf course fairways, lined by private homes throughout the former planned golf course community.

In closing, we are proud of Wake County's solid reputation for preserving open space and investing in parks and greenways. Before the controversial Crooked Creek deal, every single Wake County Commissioner has unanimously supported every parks and open space acquisition brought before the Board. After Crooked Creek is removed from the County's inventory, we will continue to honor Wake County's commitment to ensure current and future Wake County residents have increased opportunities for enjoying our beautiful local environment for generations to come.

We stand by our January 7th decision to declare the former Crooked Creek golf course as surplus County property. In that same action, we also committed the County to advance the larger and more accessible Southeast Regional County Park project in southern Wake to the #1 priority rank in Wake's Parks, Greenways & Open Space Master Plan. We are committed to working with our community partners toward a solution with a goal of preserving the former Crooked Creek golf course as open space for local residents to enjoy for years to come. We have directed staff and County resources to pursue that objective, and hope that our community and municipal partners - who spoke so favorably toward preserving the old golf course as green space - will step forward to be part of the solution. While we did not vote to spend \$4 million on this former golf course last year, we are dedicated to pursuing a path forward. At the end of our meeting on January 7th, Chair Holmes stated our mutual desire to work to preserve this land and to team with our community partners for a solution.

It is clear that some current and former Commissioners pushed this deal forward in 2017 and 2018 knowing that our professional County staff did not support the purchase and that it was not financially justified or sustainable. Even knowing it required a divisive vote that was dependent upon the support of two lame-duck Commissioners, and that funds were not available to complete the expensive process of turning it into a park, and that other County priorities were starved for desperately needed funding - they still voted to placate the residents of the Crooked Creek golf course community and their supporters. They have questioned the potential influence of campaign donors who support public education, while remaining silent on the potential

influence of their own donors who are property owners, land developers, real estate agents, and others with potential economic interests in Crooked Creek, or in the precedent it sets for taxpayers buying failed private projects. We have taken responsibility for correcting a poor decision and remain committed to working on a solution that better serves the needs of all of Wake County citizens. But we are saddened that some of our current and former colleagues have chosen to be so deeply involved with fueling discord and attacks on our character in the news media and on social media.

In the end, regardless of the misinformation and the personal attacks, we will work earnestly with the community on this opportunity to move forward - and we will keep our oath to uphold what is best for the County and all of citizens we serve.

Sincerely,

Commissioner Jessica Holmes, Chair
Commissioner Greg Ford, Vice-Chair
Commissioner Vickie Adamson
Commissioner James West

Facts from Wake County staff:

Southeast Regional County Park Project

- Total land acquisition to date is 301 acres
- County has spent \$2,385,726 (that's \$7,926 an acre)
- It will be the County's 2nd largest park (only Harris Lake is larger)
- An additional 394 acres are available for purchase
- If additional 394 acres are acquired, park would grow to 695 acres, which would make it the County's largest park
- In the process of working on the master plan, and ; first community meeting is done
- Now accelerated to #1 priority status using 2018 Parks bond money

Appraisal of Crooked Creek Property

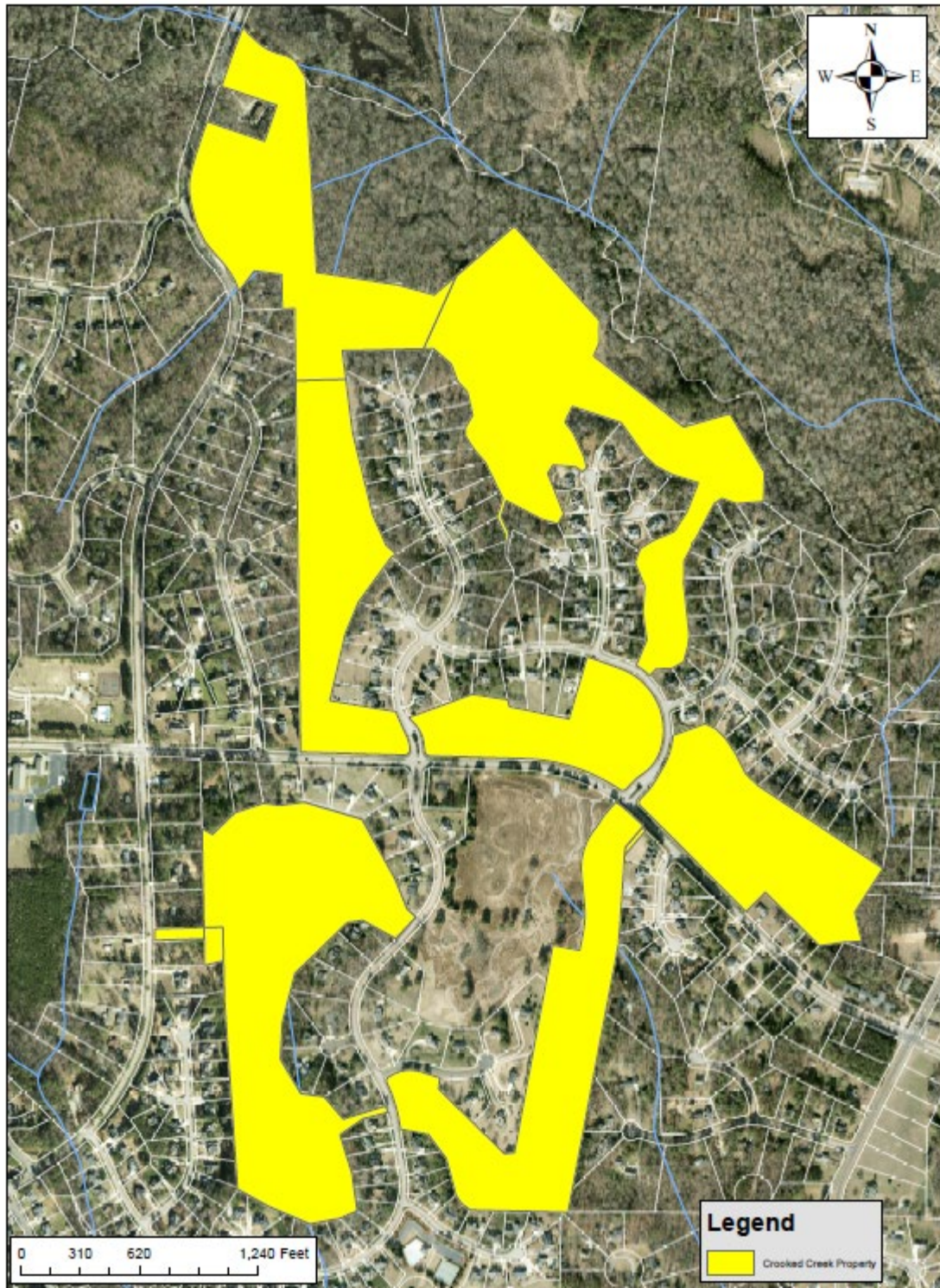
- The County contracted with B. Carter Kennemur, CCIM to conduct an appraisal of the property in October 2017
- The appraised value of the property was determined to be \$4,045,000 (that's \$28,286 an acre)
- The County purchased the 143 acre property for \$4,000,000 (\$27,972 an acre, less than 1% discount off appraised value)
- This means that Crooked Creek cost taxpayers over three times as much per acre for less than half of the acreage already purchased just a few miles away.

County Park, Open Space & Greenways Project Ranking, 2017

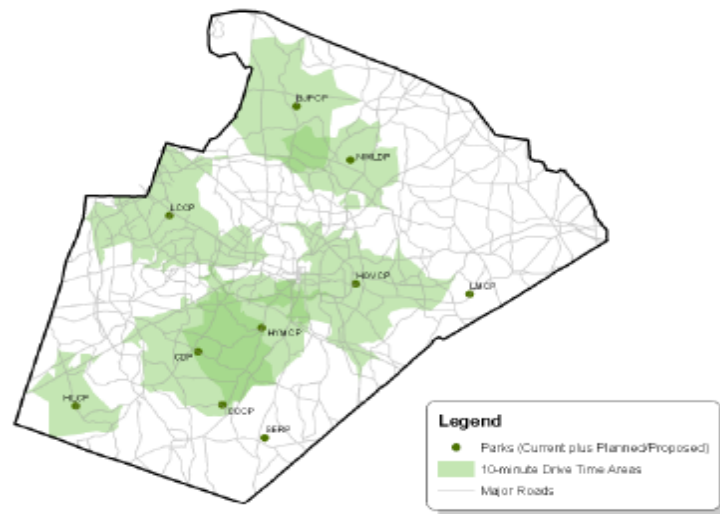
Multiple people were involved in discussions including the Open Space Advisory Committee, comprised of Wake County citizen volunteers, as well as County staff from Finance, General Services, Parks, Community Services, County Manager's Office, Budget Office, County Attorney's Office, Revenue & Environmental Services. Staff estimated costs for the projects below (1-14) at \$400+ Million. (Wake County voters approved \$120 Million for these projects in 2018.) These estimates do not include the estimated backlog on maintenance and repairs, ADA compliance needs, etc.

1. Crowder Park Expansion
2. Future Nature Preserves
3. Existing Park Improvements
4. Future Open Space
- 5. Southeast Regional Park (Southern Wake; Moved to #1 Priority at 1/7/19 BOC action)**
6. Future Greenways – "Bridge the Gaps" (See Plan)
7. Lake Myra County Park
8. Future Greenways – "Connect to Parks & Lakes" (See Plan)
9. Swift Creek Greenway
10. Future Greenways – "Connect the Communities" (See Plan)
11. Future Greenways – "Complete the System" (See Plan)
12. RDU Partnership
13. Kellam-Wyatt Farm Park
14. Triangle Bikeway
15. Crooked Creek

**Crooked Creek Property
Fuquay Varina, NC**



The following map shows the ten-minute drive time areas for existing County Parks that offer comparable access to that proposed at Crooked Creek. Please note that the following amenities are not shown: 1) the American Tobacco Trail access points, 2) nature preserves (Robertson Millpond and/or Turnipseed), and 3) Community Use of Schools properties.



The following table lists the 2017 population in each ten-minute drive time area. For the limited areas of overlap (see darker green area on map between Blue Jay Point and North Wake Landfill), the population was subdivided and included in the drive time population for the park closest to where they live—preventing double counting. The table shows that approximately 40.7 percent of the county population is within ten minutes of County Parks comparable to the Crooked Creek proposal.

Table 1 – 2017 Population for current, comparable Wake County Parks

Park	Current Parks
Blue Jay Point CP	25,108
Crooked Creek GC	---
Crowder DP	69,661
Harris Lake CP	1,033
Historic Oak View CP	122,107
Historic Yates Mill CP	61,576
Lake Crabtree CP	92,225
Lake Myra CP	---
North Wake Landfill DP	60,188
Southeast Regional CP	---
Subtotal	431,898
Wake County, Total	1,061,504
<i>Population within 10 minute drive of park</i>	<i>40.7%</i>

The next map adds the County Parks previously identified in the Wake County Comprehensive Master Plan—specifically Lake Myra County Park and Southeast Regional Park.

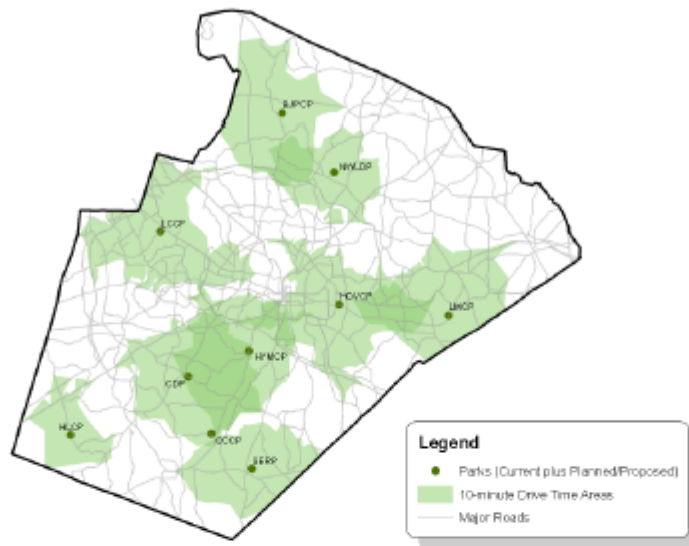


Table 2 – 2017 Population for comparable Wake County Parks; Plus Parks in Comp Master Plan

Park	Current Parks	Plus Parks in Comp Master Plan	Difference
Blue Jay Pond CP	25,108	25,108	---
Crooked Creek GC	---	---	---
Crowder DP	69,661	67,403	- 2,258
Harris Lake CP	1,033	1,033	---
Historic Oak View CP	122,107	113,368	- 8,739
Historic Yates Mill CP	61,576	61,576	---
Lake Crabtree CP	92,225	92,225	---
Lake Myra CP	---	27,216	+ 27,216
North Wake Landfill DP	60,188	60,188	---
Southeast Regional CP	---	27,879	+ 27,879
Subtotal	431,898	475,996	+ 44,098
Wake County, Total	1,061,504	1,061,504	---
<i>Population within 10 minute drive of park</i>	<i>40.7%</i>	<i>44.8%</i>	<i>+ 4.2%</i>

The table shows that approximately 44,098 people would be added to ten-minute drive time areas with the additional of Lake Myra County Park and Southeast Regional Park. The percent of the County population within ten minutes of a County Park also increases by 4.2% to total 44.8%.

The third map adds the Crooked Creek proposal.

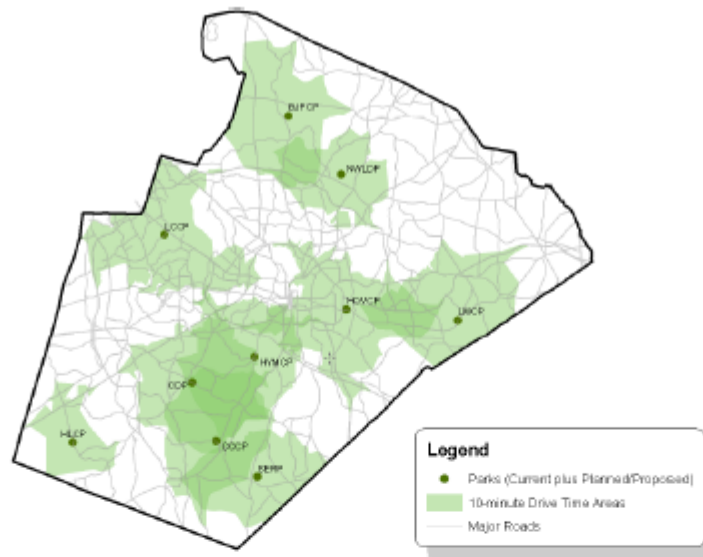
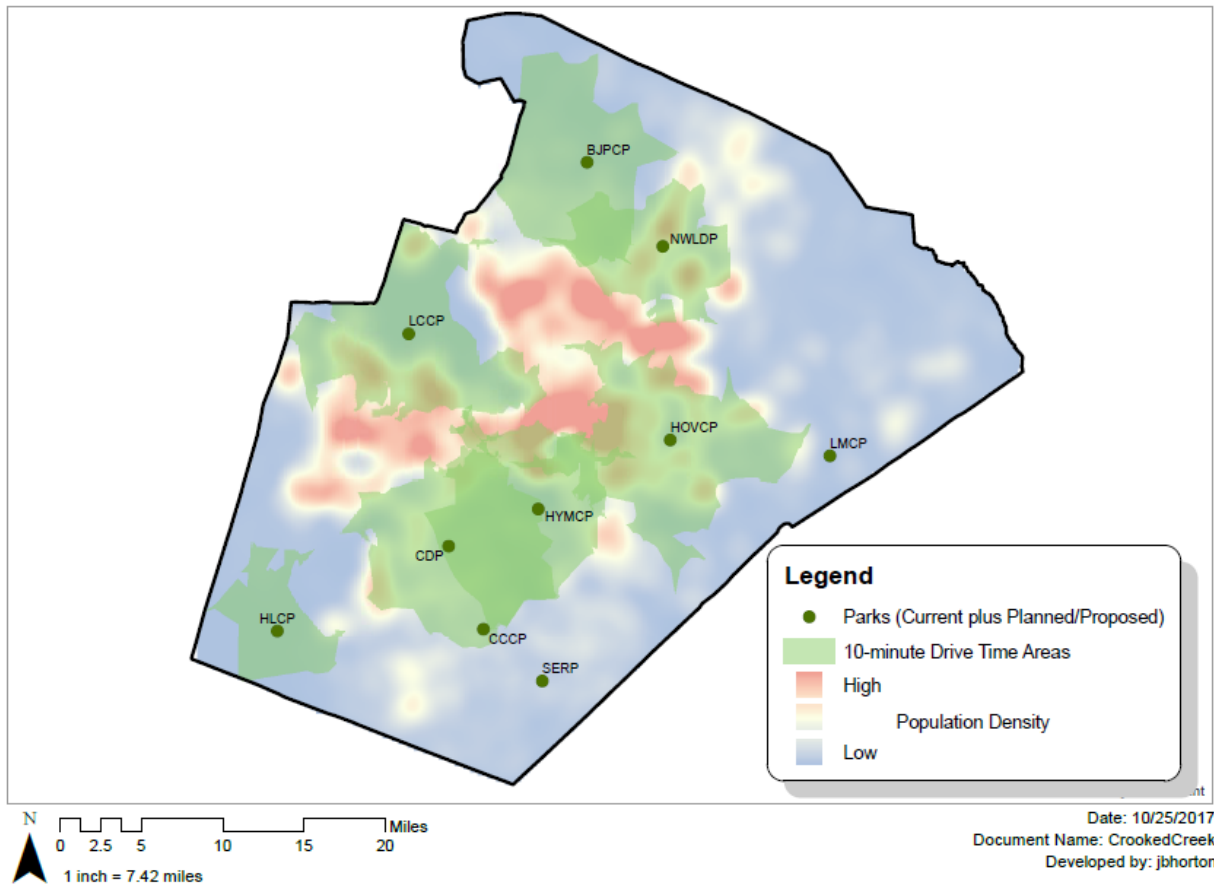


Table 3 – 2017 Population for comparable Wake County Parks; Plus Parks in Comp Master Plan and Crooked Creek

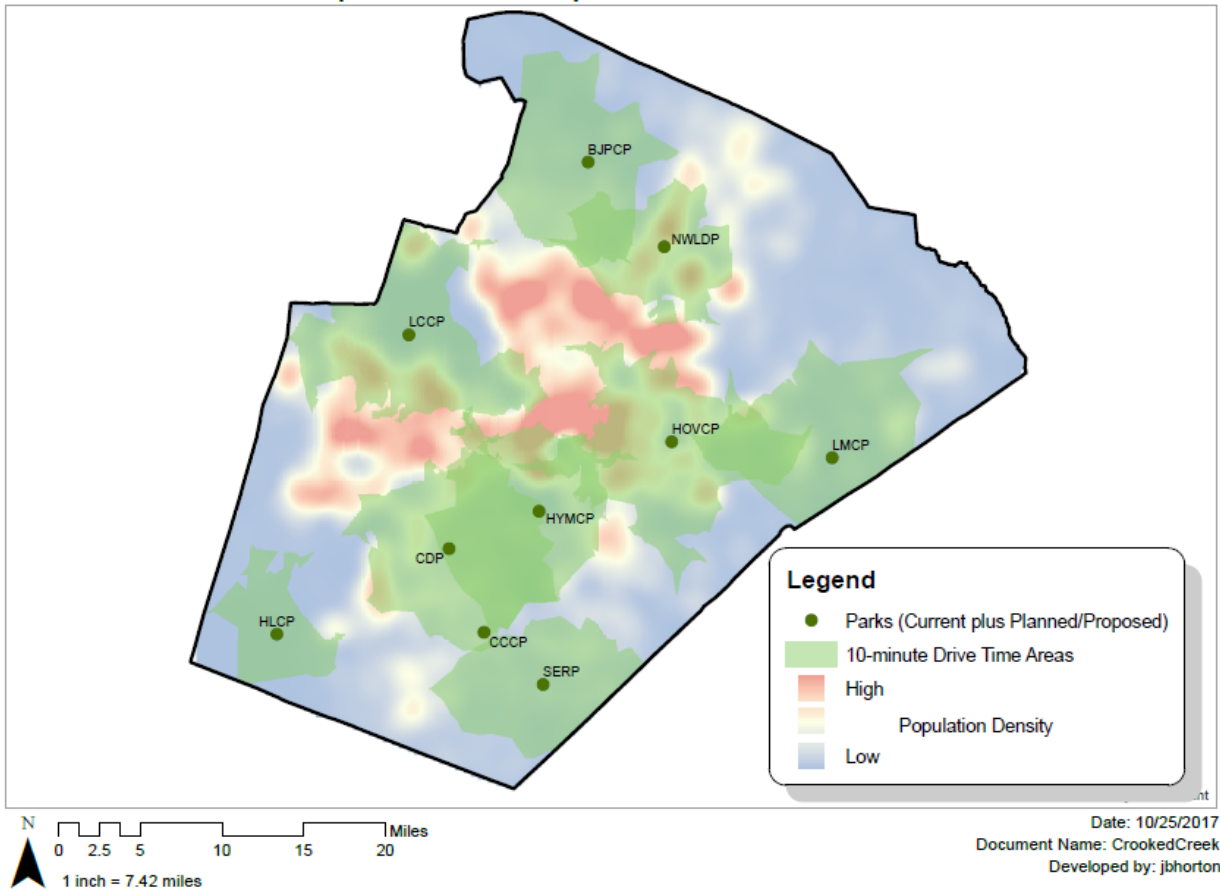
Park	Current Plus Parks in Comp Master Plan	Plus Parks in Comp Master Plan	Difference
Blue Jay Pont CP	25,108	25,108	---
Crooked Creek GC	---	26,176	+ 26,176
Crowder DP	67,403	61,352	- 6,051
Harris Lake CP	1,033	1,033	---
Historic Oak View CP	113,368	113,368	---
Historic Yates Mill CP	61,576	58,092	- 3,484
Lake Crabtree CP	92,225	92,225	---
Lake Myra CP	27,216	27,216	---
North Wake Landfill DP	60,188	60,188	---
Southeast Regional CP	27,879	17,977	- 9,902
Subtotal	475,996	482,735	+ 6,739
Wake County, Total	1,061,504	1,061,504	---
<i>Population within 10 minute drive of park</i>	<i>44.8%</i>	<i>45.5%</i>	<i>+ 0.6%</i>

The Crooked Creek proposal would provide convenient access to approximately 26,176 people. However, 19,437 would already be within ten minutes of an existing County Park or a new facility identified in the comprehensive master plan. The net difference—6,739 people—would be added to a ten-minute drive time area, an increase of .7% of the County population to bring to the total to 45.5%.

Wake County Parks - Drive Time Areas - Current System



**Wake County Parks - Drive Time Areas - Current System
plus Parks in Comprehensive Master Plan**



**Wake County Parks - Drive Time Areas - Current System
plus Parks in Comprehensive Master Plan and Crooked Creek Property**

